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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between subordinate satisfaction and superior-subordinate co-orientation regarding performance feedback rules within organizational dyads. Specifically, the study focused on how subordinate perceptions, regarding how and when informal performance feedback should be provided by a superior, would impact subordinate communication satisfaction. Subjects, 81 people in 27 triads (a salaried employee, that employee's first-line supervisor, and that supervisor's mid-level manager) from an engineering/manufacturing firm, completed two measurement instruments: the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire by Downs and Hazen (1976) and a 12-item co-orientational Communication Rules Questionnaire developed specifically for the study. Results indicated that the level of actual agreement between a superior and a subordinate did not correlate with communication satisfaction as well as the level of perceived agreement. Overall, results of the study reinforce the notion that perceptual congruence within a supervisor-subordinate relationship has an impact on important organizational outcomes. (Three tables of data are included, and 45 references are attached.) (SR)

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SUBORDINATE COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION AS A FUNCTION OF SUPERIOR-SUBORDINATE CO-ORIENTATION REGARDING PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK RULES

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between subordinate satisfaction and superior-subordinate co-orientation regarding performance feedback rules within organizational dyads. Specifically, this research focused on how subordinate perceptions, regarding how and when informal performance feedback should be provided by a superior, would impact subordinate communication satisfaction. Twenty-seven triads from an engineering/manufacturing firm formed the sample for the study. Each triad consisted of a salaried employee, that salaried employee's first-line supervisor, and that first-line supervisor's mid-level manager. The results indicated the level of actual agreement between a superior and subordinate did not correlate with communication satisfaction as well as the level of perceived agreement. No significant relationship was found between a subordinate's accuracy in predicting the responses of his or her supervisor and that subordinate's degree of communication satisfaction. For the subordinates who were first-line supervisors, no significant relationship was found between perceived agreement and supervisory communication satisfaction. However, for the first-line supervisor's subordinates (i.e., the salaried employees), a significant relationship was discovered between perceived agreement and supervisory communication satisfaction. Additionally, perceived agreement was found to be a better predictor of a subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's personal feedback, but not a better predictor of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication. Finally, no significant relationship was found between a first-line supervisor's perceived agreement, regarding performance feedback rules, with his mid-level manager and the lowest level employee's perceived agreement, concerning

performance feedback rules, with his first-line supervisor. Overall, the results of this study reinforce the notion that perceptual congruence, within a supervisor-subordinate relationship, has an impact on important organizational outcomes. The implications of this study and directions for future research were discussed.

Introduction

Context of the Problem

Superior-subordinate communication involves rules of behavior designed to enhance the communication effectiveness of the dyad (Bacon & Krayer, 1983; Boynton & Fairhurst, 1978; Laird, 1983; Rose, 1985). Specifically, a supervisor and subordinate, over time, develop interactional rules with one another to convey meanings and increase the effectiveness of their interdependent relationship. Donohue, Cushman, and Nofsinger (1980) noted that as individuals perform like-behaviors, an expected pattern or rule of behavior develops. In the context of a supervisor's behavior, this may mean that he develops a way of interacting with his subordinates that seems appropriate and effective for the situation, yet remains implicit in nature (Shimanoff, 1980).

The process of rule formation between a superior and a subordinate is transactional (Cushman & Whiting, 1972). That is to say, each participant has his own perception of the shared rule. Through interacting with one another, each participant comes to a shared perception or meaning of the rule. Donohue, Cushman, and Nofsinger (1980) argued, based on a rules perspective, that in order for two individuals to effectively solve an interpersonal issue between themselves, each person needs to be aware of the different perspectives the other holds and how the other thinks and feels. Shimanoff (1980) stated that, "a rule is a followable prescription that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts" (p. 57). The issues of behavior and context are crucial. Rules prescribe that a behavior should occur within a specific context or situation. If the prescription, behavior, or context is missing, then a

rule is not in effect. In a study performed by Cronen, Pearce, and Snavely (1979) concerning rule-structure and perceived enmeshment in undesired repetitive conversations, the researchers reported five implications for rules based research: the way people think and act in social situations can be represented by forms of rules; the form of these rules occurs in the context of the interface between the rules systems of the involved parties or actors; rules and interpersonal rule systems have a measurable variable structure; people act in episodes that vary in content but vary less in terms of structure; and, finally, the structural aspects of rules are related to the structural types of episodes.

The process of performance feedback has been cited as one of the key communicative behaviors that occur between a superior and subordinate (Cusella, 1986; Jablin, 1979; Larson, 1984). Larson's model of the performance feedback process makes an important conceptual link between performance feedback and rule-governed superior-subordinate behavior. Specifically, supervisors develop implicit ideas (i.e., rules) about when to provide feedback, what to say, and even how certain employees may react to feedback. A problem that occurs is that some employees react differently to certain types of feedback messages than do other employees (Richmond, McCroskey, & Davis, 1982). A supervisor who has developed a set of prescriptive rules for when and how to provide feedback may suddenly find that the results of his communication are not what he expected. Concerning rules in general, Bacon and Krayer (1983) stated, "Understanding between superior and subordinate presumably results from how they communicate with each other . . . If superiors and subordinates fail to understand each other's perceptions of important issues, interpersonal conflict may result" (p. 6).

Given that a supervisor's rules for performance feedback remain

relatively stable over time, two possible explanations may be proposed for the unexpected subordinate reaction and consequent potential conflict between them. Brockner (1979) reported that an individual's level of self-esteem significantly impacted his reaction to different feedback messages. Swann and Read (1981) found that perception of self-esteem impacted an individual's preference for certain feedback messages. While individual differences within subordinates provide some insight to the problem of unexpected responses to performance feedback, one other explanation should be explored.

Hatfield and Huseman (1982), as well as Felts (1985), concluded that the absence of "perceptual congruence" concerning the performance feedback process (i.e., rules) could result in interpersonal problems or tension between a supervisor and subordinate. The concept of perceptual congruence was explicated by Newcomb's (1953, 1956) co-orientational model and was recently applied to the concept of superior-subordinate communicative rules by Eisenberg, Monge, and Farace (1984). Perceptual congruence is comprised of three factors: agreement, or the correspondence between A's attitude toward X and B's attitude toward X; accuracy, or the ability of A to predict the attitude of B toward X, and vice-versa; and perceived agreement, or the degree of correspondence between predictions of the other's attitude toward X and one's own attitude toward X. Further research supporting this second explanation for a subordinate's unexpected reaction to performance feedback has found that individuals interact based on perceived agreements with others (Pulakos & Wexley, 1983). In other words, a subordinate reacts to feedback provided by his supervisor based upon the perceived agreements that exist between the both of them. An absence of perceptual congruence could lead to reactions that neither would predict, and comprise a barrier to meaningful communication (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977).

Statement of Purpose

The relationship between superior-subordinate co-orientation and communication satisfaction is of interest to organizational communication scholars (Bacon & Krayer, 1983). While co-orientation research examining initiation and termination rules between a superior and subordinate has been reported in the literature (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977), there is a lack of research examining the relationship between performance feedback rules and a subordinate's degree of communication satisfaction. Thus, it was the purpose of this study to examine the relationship between a subordinate's degree of communication satisfaction and that subordinate's degree of co-orientation with his supervisor concerning performance feedback rules. The dependent variable in this study was the subordinate's communication satisfaction, as defined and measured in Downs and Hazen's 1976 study. The independent variables in this study were two measures of superior-subordinate co-orientation (accuracy and perceived agreement) as perceived by the subordinate, based on Newcomb's (1953) conceptualization of the construct.

Rationale and Hypotheses

The notion that organizational members develop and use communication rules to convey meaning and increase the effectiveness of their relationships has been substantiated in the literature (Bacon & Krayer, 1983; Boynton & Fairhurst, 1978; Chin, 1986; Eisenberg, Monge, & Farace, 1984). Additionally, Jablin (1979) reported on over 190 studies regarding the nature of the superior-subordinate relationship. In his state-of-the-art article regarding superior-subordinate communication, Jablin (1979) noted:

> In summary, studies that explored interaction patterns between superiors and subordinates suggest frequent task-oriented communication within

> the dyad but differential attitudes and perceptions of those interactions. Moreover, personal characteristics and needs of the interactants seem to mediate their desire for and perceptions of superior-subordinate communication. (p. 1203)

There appears to be a link between the differing communicative perceptions of superiors and subordinates and the reported communication rules research in the area of co-orientation (Bacon & Krayer, 1983; DeWhirst, 1971; Eisenberg, Monge, & Farace, 1984; Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977). Specifically, superiors and subordinates vary in the degree to which they perceive the dyadic communication rules that exist between the two of them. The perceptual similarity or difference between a superior and subordinate regarding a given dyadic communication rule may ultimately impact the frequency and effectiveness of the pair's communication (Hatfield & Huseman, 1982).

Katz and Kahn (1966) noted five major types of communicative messages that occur between a superior and subordinate. One of those five message types, performance feedback, has been researched by a number of scholars seeking to learn more about its nature and impact on organizational life. Research has noted that given a certain frequency and regularity of feedback, an individual will develop conscious and/or unconscious expectations about the performance feedback he provides or receives (Larson, 1984; Taylor, Fisher, & Ilgen, 1984). In essence, superiors and subordinates probably develop rules about how and when performance feedback should be provided (Birdsall, 1976). If that is true, then the degree of perceptual congruence (i.e., co-orientation) between a superior and subordinate regarding informal performance feedback rules may help to explain one aspect of their communicative relationship.

Wanous and Lawler (1972) reported on how the perceptual differences between a superior and subordinate might impact the overall degree of satisfaction within the dyad. Downs and Hazen (1976) specifically explored the notion of communication satisfaction within an organization, developing the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire, consisting of the following eight factors: (a) communication climate, (b) corporate communication, (c) organizational integration, (d) informal communication, (e) subordinate communication, (f) media quality, (g) supervisory communication, and (h) personal feedback. The last two factors listed, supervisory communication and personal feedback, were reported by Clampitt and Girard (1986) as being the best predictor of communication satisfaction and dissatisfaction, respectively. It seems plausible that a study concerning the degree of co-orientation regarding informal performance feedback rules between a superior and subordinate might help to better explain the degree of communication satisfaction within an organizational dyad. On the basis of the foregoing literature review, and subsequent rationale, four hypotheses were posited.

Wexley, Alexander, Greenawalt, and Couch (1980) reported that co-orientational accuracy between a superior and subordinate had a positive relationship on a supervisor's evaluation of a subordinate and that subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his or her supervisor. Hatfield and Huseman (1982) found that superior-subordinate co-orientation accuracy, as perceived by the subordinate, was related to his degree of satisfaction with the superior. In a related finding, Eisenberg, Monge, and Farace (1984) reported that co-orientational accuracy, as perceived by the superior, concerning communication rules had a positive relationship to his evaluation of the subordinate. Finally, based on Clampitt and Girard's 1985 study, two of the eight communication satisfaction factors, as measured by the

CSQ (Downs & Hazen, 1976), superior communication and personal feedback, were found to be the best predictors of subordinate satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Therefore, it would seem likely that a subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication or personal feedback should increase with his ability to predict the performance feedback rules of his supervisor.

H_{1a}: There will be a positive relationship between a subordinate's accuracy concerning performance feedback rules and the subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication.

H_{1b}: There will be a positive relationship between a subordinate's accuracy concerning performance feedback rules and the subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's personal feedback.

Eisenberg, Monge, and Farace (1984), along with Pulakos and Wexley (1983), found that perceived agreement between a superior and subordinate, as perceived by the supervisor, had a positive relationship with the supervisor's performance evaluations of the subordinate. Additionally, Infante and Gorden (1979) reported that a supervisor perceived his subordinate more favorably when he perceived the subordinate as seeing the supervisor favorably. Eisenberg et al. (1984) concluded their study by stating that actual agreement or predictive accuracy was not as important within a superior-subordinate relationship as was perceived agreement. Therefore, it seems likely that a subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication or personal feedback should go up with that subordinate's level of perceived agreement regarding the performance feedback rules of his supervisor.

H_{2a}: There will be a positive relationship between a subordinate's perceived agreement concerning performance feedback rules and

the subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication.

H_{2b}: There will be a positive relationship between a subordinate's perceived agreement concerning performance feedback rules and the subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's personal feedback.

Wexley et al. (1980) and Eisenberg et al. (1984) both found that within a superior-subordinate relationship, perceived similarity or agreement with the supervisor was a better predictor of subordinate performance evaluation than was the level of actual agreement. Pulakos and Wexley (1983) stated, "these results suggest that in work settings, actual similarity may not be as important to the process of manager-subordinate interpersonal relations as is perceived similarity of the other person" (p. 130). Therefore, it seems likely that the actual level of agreement between a supervisor and subordinate concerning performance feedback rules will not be as good a predictor of communication satisfaction as perceived agreement.

H_{3a}: Perceived agreement will be a greater predictor of a subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication than actual agreement.

H_{3b}: Perceived agreement will be a greater predictor of a subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's personal feedback than actual agreement.

Based on the desire to explore the relationship between rules and communication satisfaction, within different levels of an organization, Birdsall (1976) called for co-orientational research that went beyond one level of management (e.g., subordinate to first-line supervision to mid-level management). McLeod and Chaffee (1973) also argued that co-orientational

research, within a field setting, using "natural groupings" of subjects, would enhance our knowledge of rule communication and usage. Watson, Grubb, and Ritchie (1985) suggested that different levels within an organization perceive feedback differently and that research should be conducted to examine the proposition. Webber (1970) reported that a supervisor's co-orientational perceptions, with regard to his manager or subordinates, is influenced by the total volume of communications received. Conceivably, a supervisor's perceptions about his interactions with a subordinate may be influenced by the interactions that supervisor has with his own boss. Additionally, Decker and Nathan (1985) and Russ-Eft and Zenger (1986) argued that supervisory behavior and attitudes are learned and reinforced by significant others within an organization (e.g., the supervisor's boss). Therefore, it seems likely that the perceived agreements between a first-line supervisor and his subordinate, concerning performance feedback rules, will be significantly influenced by the perceived agreement between the first-line supervisor and his mid-level manager.

H_4: There will be a positive relationship between a first-line supervisor's perceived agreement on performance feedback rules with his mid-level manager and the lowest level employee's perceived agreement concerning performance feedback rules with his first-line supervisor.

Methodology

Subjects

Subjects for this study consisted of 27 triads, comprised of one salaried subordinate, first-line supervisor, and a mid-level manager, with each triad sharing its own chain of command. The 81 participants were

from a west coast engineering/manufacturing firm that produces high technology defense systems for the U.S. military. Demographic data were collected for the 54 subordinates participating in the study (27 salaried employees and 27 first-line supervisors). The average age of the subordinates was 38 years. In terms of time with the company and time in their position, the subordinate sample averaged 9.4 and 2.8 years, respectively. Two criteria were set for participation in the study: (1) each triad of respondents must have had shared a direct reporting relationship; and (2) respondents must have had the same immediate supervisor (lowest level respondent to his first-line supervisor and first-line supervisor to his mid-level manager) for a minimum of six months.

Instruments

The two measurement instruments used in the study were the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) developed by Downs and Hazen (1976) and a 12-item co-orientational Communication Rules Questionnaire (CRQ) developed specifically for the study, modeled after the rules questionnaire originated by Eisenberg, Monge, and Farace (1984).

Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire. The CSQ consists of 46 items that measure satisfaction with eight factors: (a) communication climate, (b) corporate communication, (c) organizational integration, (d) informal communication, (3) subordinate communication, (f) media quality, (g) supervisory communication, and (h) personal feedback. For the purposes of this study, only the items for two of the dimensions (supervisory communication and personal feedback) were used in the analysis, since supervisory communication and the reception of personal feedback are closely related to vertical dyadic co-orientation. Bacon and Krayer (1983) reported the average

internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the CSQ to be .98.

Communication Rules Questionnaire. The co-orientational CRQ was designed to measure the level of superior-subordinate agreement, accuracy, and perceived agreement concerning performance feedback rules. The questionnaire consisted of 12 two-part items concerning content and procedure rules for communicating performance feedback to a subordinate. Content rules focus on what is discussed, while procedural rules focus on how things are discussed within a dyad (Birdsall, 1976; Cushman & Whiting, 1972). The CRQ was modeled after a communication rules questionnaire designed by Eisenberg, Monge, and Farace (1984). The questionnaire by Eisenberg et al. focused on communication rules regarding initiation and termination of communication between a superior and subordinate. Because this study concerned informal performance feedback rules between a superior and subordinate, new items were constructed regarding how and when positive and negative feedback should be provided to a subordinate. Utilizing a 0 to 100 percent scale, the questionnaire requested the respondent's perspective as well as how the respondent felt his superior would answer the item (e.g., "Ideally, what percentage of the time should favorable performance feedback be provided immediately after a task is completed?"; "this is what I would say . . . this is what my supervisor would say . . ."). Using the reliability program within SPSS (Hull & Nie, 1981), the 12-item CRQ had a coefficient alpha of .77.

Procedure

The host organization's compensation department provided a listing of 222 mid-level managers who supervised salaried employees. Letters, explaining the purpose and requesting participation in the study, were randomly sent to 107 of the 222 mid-level managers. Thirty-nine mid-level managers sent back,

along with their own name, the names of a first-line supervisor and salaried employee who met the criteria for the study and were willing to participate. A cover letter and two-part questionnaire (made up of the CRQ and the CSQ) were sent to the salaried employee within each of the 39 triads. Each of the 39 first-line supervisors received a cover letter and two-part questionnaire that focused on the first-line supervisor's boss (the mid-level manager). One week later a second cover letter and CRQ were sent to the same first-line supervisor; this time, however, the questionnaire focused on that first-line supervisor's salaried employee. Due to the design of the study, each of the 39 mid-level managers received a questionnaire containing only a cover letter and the CRQ. Each member of 27 triads (n=81) responded by completing the questionnaire and mailing it directly to the second author. The cover letter stated that participation was voluntary, returned information would be handled in a confidential and anonymous manner, and the results would only be reported in aggregate form. All materials were randomly coded to ensure the confidentiality of each participant while allowing superior-subordinate data to be paired.

Scoring and Data Analysis

For the CRQ, the subjects were presented with 12 communicative rules regarding informal performance feedback and asked to respond using a 0 to 100 percent scale. The respondents were asked, within the context of their superior-subordinate relationship, ideally, what percentage of the time a given informal feedback rule should be in effect. The CRQ asked for the respondent's opinion as well as what he felt his supervisor would say. The accuracy measure was computed by summing the absolute difference, for each item, of what the subordinate predicted his superior would say from what the superior actually said and subtracting the sum total from 1200 (the

maximum innacuracy score). The computation is illustrated by:

1200 - [(SbP - SpA) + (SbP - SpA) = . . . (SbP - SpA)] = accuracy, where SbP = the subordinate's prediction of his superior's response; SpA = the superior's actual response.

Perceived agreement was computed by summing the absolute difference, for each item, of what the subordinate predicted his superior would say from how the subordinate actually responded to the item and subtracting the sum total from 1200 (the maximum perceived disagreement score). The computation is illustrated by:

1200 - [(SbP - SbA) + (SbP - SbA) + . . . (SbP - SbA)] = perceived agreement, where SbP = the subordinate's prediction of his superior's response; SbA = the subordinate's own response.

To test the hypotheses, only the perceptions of the subordinate-supervisor parings (n=54 cases) were computed.

The relevant factors of the CSQ, supervisory communication and personal feedback, measured communication satisfaction through the use of a seven-point scale. Subjects were instructed to respond to the CSQ as follows: "1 = no satisfaction," "4 = average satisfaction," and "7 = maximum satisfaction." Scoring for the CSQ was performed according to the procedure employed by Downs and Hazen (1976). Using a significance level of .05, Pearson product-moment correlation measures were used to test the first, second, and fourth hypotheses. The third hypothesis was tested using Fisher's test for the difference between two independent rs (Fisher, 1970).

Results

Reliability

The two scales of the CSQ, supervisory communication and personal feedback, along with the one scale of the CRQ, were tested for internal

consistency using Cronbach's alpha. Internal consistency reliability for all scales was computed using the salaried employee, first-line supervisor, and mid-level manager samples. The internal consistency reliability for the supervisory communication and personal feedback factors of the CSQ was .85 and .83, respectively. The CRQ's internal consistency reliability was .77. All of the items were included in the subsequent testing of the hypotheses.

Correlations

Hypothesis one. The first hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between a subordinate's accuracy concerning performance feedback rules and the subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication. The accuracy measure was computed by summing the absolute difference, for each item, of what the subordinate predicted his superior would say from what the superior actually said and subtracting the sum total from 1200 (the maximum inaccuracy score). A Pearson product-moment correlation was utilized to examine the relationship between the subordinate's accuracy for predicting his supervisor's response and the subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication and personal feedback. Hypothesis 1a predicted a positive relationship between a subordinate's accuracy and that subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication. The results were not significant ($r=.14$, $p=.16$, $n=52$). Because the hypothesis predicted only a positive relationship, a one-tailed test was utilized. According to Cohen (1977), for a sample of 52 subjects, there was sufficient power (.71) to find a medium effect size and to indicate a correlation of $\geq .30$ as statistically significant. Hypothesis 1b predicted a positive relationship between a subordinate's accuracy and that subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's personal feedback. The results were not significant

(r=-.12, p=.19, n=52) (see Table 1). Because the hypothesis predicted only a positive relationship, a one-tailed test was utilized. According to Cohen (1977), for a sample of 52 subjects, there was sufficient power (.71) to find a medium effect size and to indicate a correlation of $\geq$ .30 as statistically significant.

Hypothesis two. The second hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between a subordinate's perceived agreement concerning performance feedback rules and that subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication and personal feedback. Perceived agreement was computed by summing the absolute difference, for each item, of what the subordinate predicted his superior would say from how the subordinate actually responded to the item and subtracting the sum total from 1200 (the maximum perceived disagreement score). A Pearson product-moment correlation was utilized to examine the relationship between the subordinate's perceived agreement with his supervisor's response and the subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication and personal feedback. Hypothesis 2a predicted a positive relationship between a subordinate's perceived agreement and that subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication. For the subordinates who were first-line supervisors (n=27), the results were not significant (r=.08, p=.35). However, for the subordinates who were salaried employees (n=26) the results were significant (r=.41, p=.01). Combined, the subordinate sample (n=53) had an r of .23 (p=.05). Because the hypothesis predicted only a positive relationship, a one-tailed test was utilized. According to Cohen (1977), for a sample of 53 subjects, there was sufficient power (.71) to find a medium effect size and to indicate a correlation of $\geq$ .30 as statistically significant. Hypothesis 2b predicted a positive relationship between a subordinate's perceived agreement and that

subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's personal feedback. The combined results of both subordinate samples yielded an **r** of .28 (p=.02, n=53) (see Table 2). Because the hypothesis predicted only a positive relationship, a one-tailed test was utilized. According to Cohen (1977), for a sample of 53 subjects, there was sufficient power (.71) to find a medium effect size and to indicate a correlation of $\geq$ .30 as statistically significant.

Hypothesis three. The third hypothesis predicted perceived agreement would be a greater predictor of a subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication and personal feedback than actual agreement. Because this hypothesis examined the difference between correlations, perceived agreement and accuracy with supervisory communication, compared to perceived agreement and accuracy with personal feedback, Fisher's test for the difference between two independent **r**s was used (Fisher, 1970). Specifically, hypothesis 3a stated perceived agreement would be a greater predictor of a subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's communication than actual agreement. With a .05 confidence level, **z** would have to be ±1.96 to reject the null hypothesis. For hypothesis 3a, the results were not significant (z=.46, p>.05). Hypothesis 3b stated perceived agreement would be a greater predictor of a subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's personal feedback than actual agreement. The results of hypothesis 3b were significant (z=2.69, p<.05) (see Table 3).

Hypothesis four. The fourth hypothesis predicted there would be a positive relationship between a first-line supervisor's perceived agreement, regarding performance feedback rules, with his mid-level manager and the salaried employee's perceived agreement, concerning performance feedback rules, with his first-line supervisor. A Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated, which yielded an **r** of .21 (p=.15).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between subordinate satisfaction and superior-subordinate co-orientation regarding performance feedback rules within organizational dyads. Specifically, this research focused on how subordinate perceptions, regarding how and when informal performance feedback should be provided by a superior, would impact subordinate communication satisfaction. The results of this study reinforce the notion that perceptual congruence, within an organizational dyad, impacts important organizational outcomes (Hatfield & Huseman, 1982). Similar to Eisenberg, Monge, and Farace (1984), but using a sample of 81 predominantly college-educated salaried professionals, the results of this study suggest a strong relationship between perceived agreement and communication satisfaction.

The results of the first hypothesis showed the level of actual agreement between a superior and subordinate did not correlate with communication satisfaction as well as the level of perceived agreement. The inability of actual agreement to correlate with measures of satisfaction has been reported in the literature. Webber (1970) reported significant differences in the perceptions of superiors and subordinates as to the frequency and initiation of interpersonal communication within a dyad. Webber stated, "Our investigation so far clearly indicates that there are a variety of distortions in the mutual perception of interaction between superiors and subordinates" (p. 244). Organizational members potentially distort their perceptions of the behavior of others and themselves in order to compliment their own self image. Webber reported that superiors exaggerate the amount of downward communication they initiate to subordinates while a passive subordinate tends to exaggerate the amount of upward communication he is initiating. Based on Webber's findings, it is clear that accurate predictions of a superior's behavior or attitude

may be influenced by the subordinate's self-image or personality. Within this study, no significant relationship was found between a subordinate's accuracy in predicting the responses of his supervisor and that subordinate's degree of communication satisfaction.

Infante and Gorden (1979) suggested a superior's inability to accurately predict the opinion of a subordinate may indicate a superior has less of a need to be accurate about how he is perceived because a superior's position power may be exercised in place of interpersonal understanding when attempting to influence a subordinate. If that is true, a superior may be less concerned about expressing his beliefs or perceptions to a subordinate and thus make it more difficult for that subordinate to accurately assess the feelings or opinions of the superior. A superior who was concerned with how he was perceived in the workplace may make more of an attempt to communicate the feelings and reasons behind his behavior.

The results of the second hypothesis lend further support to the relationship between perceived agreement and communication satisfaction (Hatfield & Huseman, 1982; Wexley, Alexander, Greenawalt, & Couch, 1980). One contradictory finding was that for first-line supervisors, no significant relationship was found between perceived agreement and satisfaction with supervisory communication. Earlier research by Downs (1977) may help to explain this unpredicted result.

Downs (1977) reported on the use of an open-ended questionnaire, using a sample of 573 organizational members, where most of the comments focused on downward versus upward communication. It may be that for a first-line supervisor, the more significant relationship(s) is with his subordinate(s) rather than his manager. Typically, a first-line supervisor's success is more dependent on his employee's performance than the performance of his

manager. Additionally, a first-line supervisor within the host organization has anywhere from three to 30 employees reporting to him, while he would have only one line manager. Accordingly, the reason hypothesis 2a was not confirmed may have been due to the fact that a first-line supervisor in this organization may be more focused on his subordinate relationships instead of his managerial relationship.

The results of hypothesis 2b reinforce the earlier research by Eisenberg, Monge, and Farace (1984) where a significant relationship was reported between perceived agreement on communication rules of initiation and termination and supervisory performance evaluations. Similar support for the results of hypothesis 2b was provided by Wexley, Alexander, Greenawalt, and Couch (1980) when they stated, ". . . the more congruently a subordinate perceived the manager's attitudes, the more satisfied the subordinate was with supervision received from the manager" (p. 328). The state of mutual congruence between a superior and subordinate should provide a feeling of interpersonal satisfaction within the dyad. What becomes salient to a superior or subordinate is not the actual agreement that exists with another individual; rather, it is the perception of agreement that a supervisor or subordinate will react to. In a similar manner, when a superior or subordinate perceives a dissimilar attitude in the other, that will also impact the communication within the dyad. Pulakos and Wexley (1983) stated:

> It can be speculated that when mutual perceptual dissimilarity ensues within a manager-subordinate relationship, managers substantially reduce the frequency with which they exhibit behaviors that enhance their subordinate's feelings of worth and that facilitate the subordinate's ability to achieve work goals. (p. 137)

Clearly, the perception of another individual's behavior or attitude will

impact the level and quality of communication within an organizational dyad.

The results of hypothesis three were only partially confirmed. Perceived agreement was a better predictor of a subordinate's degree of satisfaction with his supervisor's personal feedback, but it was not a better predictor of supervisory communication. The direct relationship between the 12 items comprising the Communication Rules Questionnaire and the five items comprising the personal feedback factor of the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire potentially explains this finding. No significant relationship was discovered for the five-item supervisory communication factor because the Communication Rules Questionnaire focused entirely on the timeliness and appropriateness of providing informal performance feedback.

While this study suggests a relationship between a subordinate's perceived agreement regarding informal performance feedback rules and his supervisor's personal feedback, a more comprehensive measure of supervisory communication rules needs to be developed to accurately assess the impact a subordinate's level of perceived agreement has on his degree of supervisory communication satisfaction.

Hypothesis four was predicated on the behavior modeling research that has suggested a supervisor's behavior and attitudes are influenced by significant others within an organization (e.g., the supervisor's manager) (Decker & Nathan, 1985; Russ-Eft & Zenger, 1986). However, research by Larson, Glynn, Fleenor, and Scontrino (1985) suggested subordinates are unable to accurately differentiate specific aspects of their superior's feedback behavior (timeliness, specificity, frequency, and sensitivity). If a first-line supervisor was unable to accurately describe his manager's feedback behavior, then it is doubtful that the manager's feedback behavior would significantly

influence the first-line supervisor's own feedback behavior.

Taylor, Fisher, and Ilgen (1984) stated, "Clear and direct feedback is a rarity in many work settings due to long lags between behavior and resulting outcomes and the typical reluctance of human feedback souces to provide this information" (p. 95). It may be due to the lack of feedback from a mid-level manager, that a first-line supervisor is unable to learn how and when to provide feedback to his subordinates. Or, the minimal amount of feedback from a superior to a subordinate may not be due to the lack of a good role model; rather, minimal amounts of performance feedback may be due to a reluctance of providing negative information.

This study has a number of limitations impacting the generalizabiity of the results. Due to the unique research design of the study, only groups of three employees, sharing the same chain of command, could be used as sample subjects. That condition caused two limiting factors. The first limitation was the omission of unpaired data. Any questionnaires that were returned but that could not be matched with the other two members of the triad were not used. The examination of three separate organizational levels, while called for in previous research, led to the relatively small sample size of 27 triads (81 subjects). The nature of the hypotheses only examined the subordinate's perspective so the subordinate sample size was no more than 54.

The second limitation of the research design required that three members of a managerial chain of command all be willing to participate in the study. Due to time constraints, the researchers sent out random letters to managers throughout the organization asking for groups of three volunteers for the study. While each participant received a letter explaining the voluntary nature and requirements for participation, the researchers were dependent on the managers in the host organization to provide the names of the three

individuals willing to participate. Therefore, the selection of the participants was not entirely random. Of the 39 sets of names that were returned, 27 triads completed all of the questionnaires and fulfilled the requirements for inclusion in the study.

The next limitation is that the demographic data were only collected in aggregate form for 54 of the participants. No demographic data were collected for the mid-level managers. Additionally, no demographic data were collected by level in the organization or for each specific triad. Therefore, no post-hoc conclusions can be drawn about the demographic nature of the salaried employees versus the first-line supervisors versus the mid-level managers.

A significant limitation seems to be the nature and design of the Communication Rules Questionnaire. Ideally, the item construction should be based on subject self-report data that would be transformed into specific items which would be pilot tested and factor analyzed to provide the researcher some assurance of item validity. The CRQ was designed using a parallel structure to the items constructed by Eisenberg, Monge, and Farace (1984). The type of items included were selected based on a review of the relevant literature on performance feedback. Additionally, limiting the size of the instruments to 12 items did not allow a meaningful factor analysis.

Based upon the results of the study, the final limitation concerns the nature of the hypotheses themselves. Examining subordinate communication satisfaction through both the supervisory communication and personal feedback factors of the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire was potentially unfruitful due to the fact that the Communication Rules Questionnaire focused entirely on how and when a supervisor should provide informal performance feedback. A more general instrument was needed in order to test the hypotheses concerning overall supervisory communication. The nature of the Communication

Rules Questionnaire probably prevented an accurate assessment of how actual and perceived agreements, concerning dyadic communication rules, impact a subordinate's communication satisfaction with his superior's overall communication.

Based on the results of this study, several suggestions for future research can be proposed. First, future rules research on organizational members should incorporate multiple data collection methods. Shimanoff (1985) and Shockley-Zalabak (1986) have both suggested that future rules based research attempt to use detailed questioning procedures and careful observations of organizational members. However, future rules research using either interviews or observations alone instead of both interviews and observations may be open to the criticism noted within Adler's (1978) article where he argued that simply being able to verbalize a rule does not, in and of itself, prove the existence of a rule. In fact, Adler argued that even questioning a subject regarding a rule's existence assumes the subject can accurately reflect the true nature of the rule and/or won't attempt to deceive the researcher. Adler did note that a subject's "applied knowledge" of a rule can be observed by the subject's ability to perform in accordance with a given rule.

Second, McCleod and Chaffee (1973) noted that future co-orientational research should attempt to avoid collecting data at only one point in time, and instead use a process that collects data over time. Due to the time concerns of the host organization in this study, the collection of data was only allowed at a single point in time.

Third, this study made an attempt to examine the constructs involved utilizing three levels of the organization in concert with one another. Future research on organizational communication relationships may benefit from examining perceptions of organizational members beyond vertical dyadic

units. In particular, the middle position in a vertical triad may provide a source of rich data.

Fourth, referring back to Brockner (1979) and Swann and Read (1981), additional research needs to be performed exploring the impact a subordinate's level of self-esteem has on the process of receiving informal performance feedback from a superior. While this study showed there was a link between perceptual congruence regarding informal performance feedback rules and a subordinate's communication satisfaction, the alternative explanation that a subordinate's level of self-esteem impacted his communication satisfaction was not controlled for.

Fifth, almost three-fourths of the respondents in this study were male. Recent research by Lamude, Daniels, and Graham (1988) found that rules co-orientation was greater in different sex supervisor-subordinate dyads than in same sex ones but communication satisfaction perceptions were lower. Such a mediating relationship might be tested in a three-tiered unit in various combinations in regard to informal feedback rules.

Sixth, future research might attempt to discover what impact a superior's span of control has on the communication rules he attempts to enforce. It conceptually makes sense that the amount of time a superior has to communicate with each of his subordinates is inversely proportional to the number of subordinates he supervises. Thus, a supervisor with fewer employees is likely to have more time to establish such rules with each individual. Likewise, with a fewer number of subordinates such rules are likely to be less formal and bureaucratized.

And, finally, future research might test the findings which emerged in this study against other types of organizations. The organization involved here might be described as highly bureaucratic; a smaller, flatter

organization (i.e., where distinctions between management and labor are less pronounced) might yield different results.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

CORRELATION COEFFICIENT FOR CO-ORIENTATIONAL

ACCURACY AND SUBORDINATE COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

Independent Variable	r	variance	N	Significance (one-tailed)
Supervisory Communication Satisfaction	.137	.019	52	.16
Personal Feedback Satisfaction	-.123	.015	52	.19

Table 2

CORRELATION COEFFICIENT FOR CO-ORIENTATIONAL PERCEIVED AGREEMENT AND SUBORDINATE COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

Independent Variable	r	variance	N	Significance (one-tailed)
Supervisory Communication Satisfaction	.228	.052	53	.05
Personal Feedback Satisfaction	.282	.079	53	.02

Table 3

FISHER'S CORRELATIONAL TEST OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RS

	Perceived Agreement	Accuracy	Z
Supervisory Communication Satisfaction	.226	.137	.46
Personal Feedback	.395	-.123	*2.69

Note. Table shows both perceived agreement/supervisory communication satisfaction with accuracy/supervisory communication satisfaction and perceived agreement/personal feedback satisfaction with accuracy/personal feedback satisfaction.

*p<.05